



MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

DATE: April 11, 2005

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item IX: Consideration of resolution authorizing the acquisition of approximately 0.11 acres (APN 2277-021-006) in Sherman Oaks using funds from Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation District No. 1, Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the acquisition of approximately 0.11 acres (APN 2277-021-006) in Hopevale-Pacheco area of Sherman Oaks using funds from Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation District No. 1.

Background: The subject portion of Area A of the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority's Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation District No. 1 is a distinct natural bowl on the north-facing slope of the range. It is comprised of numerous small lots and a limited paper street network. Development attempts have been ongoing for over 20 years and continue with great pressure to date.

The subject area supports extensive walnut woodlands. Virtually all of the lots support numerous California black walnut trees. In combination with the downslope, unbuilt portions of dozens of surrounding lots on Cody Road and Sherview Drive, the subject bowl comprises a large, ecologically significant habitat area. Good habitat linkages connect the bowl to the canyons to the east and the west. The multi-acre bowl is part of a much larger contiguous habitat block that curls eastward and then extends south almost to Mulholland Drive just east of its intersection with Woodcliff Road.

In the course of two meetings, the District No. 1 Citizens Oversight Committee adopted resolutions determining that virtually every undeveloped parcel in the bowl is consistent with the criteria and requirements in the Final Engineer's Report. The subject parcel is in that report. Neighborhood access to the open space area is available from the termini of both Hopevale and Pacheco Drives.

The bulk of the lots in the described bowl are owned by a consortium of LLCs that are represented by one person. They filed for a grading permit to construct 12 homes on approximately 21 lots the day before the City's new retaining wall ordinance became effective. Nonetheless, the protection of some portion of the bowl is worth the investment of assessment district funding. There is strong neighborhood support to acquire the maximum amount of open space. Likewise, the organized neighborhood group has guaranteed that they will provide an endowment for any necessary fuel modification. Fortunately, virtually all of the brush clearance in canyon is required on the back slopes of the existing developed lots that rim the canyon. All of the parcels of importance to the MRCA in the bowl have been appraised.

The subject parcel, APN 2277-021-006, is the first parcel on the left where Hopevale Drive turns into a dirt road. The seller is willing and motivated. Staff has met with the representative of hopeful developers of the described 21 lots. With a combination of private money and assessment district funds, staff hopes to convince that entity to sell. However, the first lot is important to maintain adequate public access to the bowl. There is some risk in acquiring what may become an isolated parcel, but a risk and any brushing liability is warranted in this situation. The owner of the house immediately north of APN 2277-021-006 has agreed to sign any necessary documents to obligate his property to do the brush clearance on APN 2277-021-006.